

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF OHIO
EASTERN DIVISION

LUIS FLECHA,

Plaintiff,

v.

Civil Action 2:25-cv-779
Judge Michael H. Watson
Magistrate Judge Chelsey M. Vascura

MIKE DEWINE, *et al.*,

Defendants.

ORDER and REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Plaintiff, Luis Flecha, an Ohio inmate who is proceeding without the assistance of counsel, sues Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (“ODRC”) Director Annette Chambers-Smith, and ODRC under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, alleging that Plaintiff was subject to excessive force by an ODRC employee. This matter is before the Court for the initial screen of Plaintiff’s Complaint under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A to identify cognizable claims and to recommend dismissal of Plaintiff’s Complaint, or any portion of it, which is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A(b)(1)–(2); *see also McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 608 (6th Cir. 1997). Having performed the initial screen, it is **RECOMMENDED** that the Court **DISMISS** Plaintiff’s Complaint for failure to state a claim on which relief may be granted.

This matter is also before the Court for consideration of Plaintiff’s motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(1) and (2), which is **GRANTED**. (ECF

No. 1.) Plaintiff must pay the full amount of the Court's \$350 filing fee. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1). Plaintiff's certified trust fund statement reveals that he has \$1.19 in his prison account, which is insufficient to pay the filing fee.

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1), the custodian of Plaintiff's inmate trust accounts (Inmate ID Number A794028) at the Ohio State Penitentiary is **DIRECTED** to submit to the Clerk of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio as an initial partial payment, 20% of the greater of either the average monthly deposits to the inmate trust account or the average monthly balance in the inmate trust account, for the six months immediately preceding the filing of the Complaint.

After full payment of the initial, partial filing fee, the custodian shall submit 20% of the inmate's preceding monthly income credited to the account, but only when the amount in the account exceeds \$10.00, until the full fee of \$350.00 has been paid to the Clerk of this Court. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601 (6th Cir. 1997).

Checks should be made payable to: Clerk, United States District Court. The checks should be sent to:

Prisoner Accounts Receivable
260 U.S. Courthouse
85 Marconi Boulevard
Columbus, Ohio 43215

The prisoner's name and this case number must be included on each check.

It is **ORDERED** that Plaintiff be allowed to prosecute his action without prepayment of fees or costs and that judicial officers who render services in this action shall do so as if the costs had been prepaid. The Clerk of Court is **DIRECTED** to mail a copy of this Order to Plaintiff and the prison cashier's office.

I. STANDARD OF REVIEW

Congress enacted 28 U.S.C. § 1915, the federal *in forma pauperis* statute, seeking to “lower judicial access barriers to the indigent.” *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 31 (1992). In doing so, however, “Congress recognized that ‘a litigant whose filing fees and court costs are assumed by the public, unlike a paying litigant, lacks an economic incentive to refrain from filing frivolous, malicious, or repetitive lawsuits.’” *Id.* at 31 (quoting *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324 (1989)). To address this concern, Congress included subsection (e):

(2) Notwithstanding any filing fee, or any portion thereof, that may have been paid, the court shall dismiss the case at any time if the court determines that—

* * *

(B) the action or appeal—

(i) is frivolous or malicious; [or]

(ii) fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted. . . .

28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) & (ii); *Denton*, 504 U.S. at 31. Thus, § 1915(e) requires *sua sponte* dismissal of an action upon the Court’s determination that the action is frivolous or malicious, or upon determination that the action fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. *See also* 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (requiring a court to conduct a screening of “a complaint in a civil action in which a prisoner seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity . . . [to] identify cognizable claims or dismiss the complaint, or any portion of the complaint [that is] frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted”).

Further, to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, a plaintiff must satisfy the basic federal pleading requirements set forth in Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a). *See also Hill v. Lappin*, 630 F.3d 468, 470–71 (6th Cir. 2010) (applying Federal Rule of Civil Procedure

12(b)(6) standards to review under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A and 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii)). Under Rule 8(a)(2), a complaint must contain a “short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). Thus, Rule 8(a) “imposes legal *and* factual demands on the authors of complaints.” *16630 Southfield Ltd., P’Ship v. Flagstar Bank, F.S.B.*, 727 F.3d 502, 503 (6th Cir. 2013).

Although this pleading standard does not require “detailed factual allegations, a pleading that offers labels and conclusions or a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action” is insufficient. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (cleaned up). A complaint will not “suffice if it tenders naked assertion devoid of further factual enhancement.” *Id.* (cleaned up). Instead, to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, “a complaint must contain sufficient factual matter to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Id.* (cleaned up). Facial plausibility is established “when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Id.* “The plausibility of an inference depends on a host of considerations, including common sense and the strength of competing explanations for the defendant’s conduct.” *Flagstar Bank*, 727 F.3d at 504 (citations omitted). Further, the Court holds *pro se* complaints “to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.” *Garrett v. Belmont Cty. Sheriff’s Dep’t*, 374 F. App’x 612, 614 (6th Cir. 2010) (quoting *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972)). This lenient treatment, however, has limits; “courts should not have to guess at the nature of the claim asserted.” *Frengler v. Gen. Motors*, 482 F. App’x 975, 976–77 (6th Cir. 2012) (quoting *Wells v. Brown*, 891 F.2d 591, 594 (6th Cir. 1989)).

II. ANALYSIS

Plaintiff alleges that on November 10, 2024, he was transported in an ambulance to the Ohio State University Medical Center. During transport, Officer T. McClain falsely accused

Plaintiff of violent behavior and delivered two closed-fist strikes to Plaintiff's face, breaking Plaintiff's nose. Plaintiff required emergency surgery to treat his injuries and has been permanently disfigured. Plaintiff also requires additional ongoing treatment, but fears retaliation (including fear for his life) if he continues to request medical assistance from ODRC. As relief, Plaintiff seeks \$1 million in damages. (Compl., ECF No. 1-1.)

The undersigned construes Plaintiff's Complaint to advance a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for excessive force in violation of the Eighth Amendment. Plaintiff's Complaint must be dismissed for failure to state a claim on which relief can be granted.

First, to the extent that Plaintiff sues ODRC (an instrumentality of the State of Ohio) or Defendants DeWine and Chambers-Smith in their official capacities, those claims must be dismissed under the doctrine of sovereign immunity. The Eleventh Amendment operates as a bar to federal-court jurisdiction when a private citizen sues a state or its instrumentalities unless the state has given express consent. *Pennhurst St. Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 100 (1983); *Lawson v. Shelby Cty.*, 211 F.3d 331, 334 (6th Cir. 2000). A suit against a state official in his or her official capacity is "not a suit against the official but rather is a suit against the official's office," and is therefore "no different from a suit against the State itself." *Will v. Mich. Dep't of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989). "There are three exceptions to sovereign immunity: (1) when the state has waived immunity by consenting to the suit, (2) when Congress has expressly abrogated the states' sovereign immunity, and (3) when the doctrine set forth in *Ex Parte Young*, 209 U.S. 123, 28 S.Ct. 441, 52 L.Ed. 714 (1908), applies." *Boler v. Earley*, 865 F.3d 391, 410 (6th Cir. 2017) (citation omitted). None of these exceptions apply to Plaintiff's Complaint. First, "Ohio has not waived sovereign immunity in federal court." *Mixon v. State of Ohio*, 193 F.3d 389, 397 (6th Cir. 1999). Second, "Section 1983 does not abrogate Eleventh

Amendment immunity.” *Boler*, 865 F.3d at 410 (citing *Will*, 491 U.S. at 66). Third, the *Ex Parte Young* doctrine applies only when a plaintiff brings “claims for prospective relief against state officials sued in their official capacity to prevent future federal constitutional or statutory violations.” *Boler*, 865 F.3d at 412. Plaintiff’s claim for damages—the only form of relief sought—falls outside the scope of *Ex Parte Young*. Accordingly, any official-capacity claims, and Plaintiff’s claims against ODRC, must be dismissed.

Second, to the extent Plaintiff sue Defendants DeWine and Chambers-Smith in their individual capacities, those claims must be dismissed for failure to allege the Defendants’ personal involvement in Plaintiff’s injuries. To prevail on a § 1983 claim, a plaintiff must plead two elements: “(1) deprivation of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States (2) caused by a person acting under color of state law.” *Hunt v. Sycamore Cmty. Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ.*, 542 F.3d 529, 534 (6th Cir. 2008) (citing *McQueen v. Beecher Cmty. Sch.*, 433 F.3d 460, 463 (6th Cir. 2006)). To establish the second element, a plaintiff must show “personal involvement” by the defendant. *Grinter v. Knight*, 532 F.3d 567, 575 (6th Cir. 2008) (citation omitted). This is because “§ 1983 liability cannot be imposed under a theory of *respondeat superior*.” *Id.* (citation omitted). Thus, to hold a supervisor liable under § 1983, a plaintiff “must show that the official at least implicitly authorized, approved, or knowingly acquiesced in the unconstitutional conduct.” *Everson v. Leis*, 556 F.3d 484, 495 (6th Cir. 2009) (cleaned up). Plaintiff’s allegations do not mention Defendants DeWine or Chambers-Smith and therefore he has not plausibly alleged that they authorized or acquiesced in Officer McClain’s use of excessive force. Plaintiff therefore cannot succeed on individual-capacity claims against Defendants DeWine or Chambers-Smith.

III. DISPOSITION

For the reasons above, Plaintiff's Motion for Leave to Proceed *In Forma Pauperis* (ECF No. 1) is **GRANTED**. It is **RECOMMENDED** that the Court **DISMISS** Plaintiff's Complaint for failure to state a claim on which relief can be granted pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A(b) and 1915(e)(2).

PROCEDURE ON OBJECTIONS

If any party objects to this Report and Recommendation, that party may, within fourteen (14) days of the date of this Report, file and serve on all parties written objections to those specific proposed findings or recommendations to which objection is made, together with supporting authority for the objection(s). A District Judge of this Court shall make a *de novo* determination of those portions of the Report or specified proposed findings or recommendations to which objection is made. Upon proper objections, a District Judge of this Court may accept, reject, or modify, in whole or in part, the findings or recommendations made herein, may receive further evidence or may recommit this matter to the Magistrate Judge with instructions. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1).

The parties are specifically advised that failure to object to the Report and Recommendation will result in a waiver of the right to have the District Judge review the Report and Recommendation *de novo*, and also operates as a waiver of the right to appeal the decision of the District Court adopting the Report and Recommendation. *See Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *United States v. Walters*, 638 F.2d 947 (6th Cir. 1981).

IT IS SO ORDERED.

/s/ Chelsey M. Vascura
CHELSEY M. VASCURA
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE